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Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

**AFFIRMING AFFIRMATIVE ACTION** – It is fashionable in some circles today to knock affirmative action as a quota system that discriminates against white males. Nonsense, says A. Knighton Stanley, pastor of Peoples UCC, Washington, D.C. "Affirmative action is not necessarily giving minorities and women an edge," he says. But it does "cause people to consider deeply the qualifications of people who historically have been left out on a limb."

**O MEN** – It was inevitable. Women, gays, various racial and ethnic groups, all have a voice in the UCC. And now men have gotten organized. An informal group of males has just issued the Silver Lake Challenge to all males in the denomination to identify men's issues in church, themselves and society – issues like sexuality, violence, relations with women and children, the environment and what it means to be masculine.

For a copy of the Challenge, write the Rev. R. Alan Johnson, United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115; (216) 736-3827.

**TO HEAL A NATION** – Although no UCC members are believed to have perished in the Oklahoma City bombing, the denomination and members have responded with prayers, public support and money. The United Church Board for World Ministries rushed \$5,000 in One Great Hour of Sharing funds to the Kansas/Oklahoma Conference to affirm the two UCC congregations in the city, "for they will have a role as peacemakers and people helping to rehabilitate and counsel those going through hard times." UCC president Paul H. Sherry called for mourning for those lost, prayer for those still awaiting word and praise for rescue workers. In addition 17 UCC members, including Sherry, who comprise the UCC's Pacific Islander Asian American Implementation Team, issued a statement during an April meeting in San Francisco. "We hurt with our brothers and sisters of Middle Eastern heritage," team members said, because they were unfairly targeted by the media following the bombing.

**THOUGHTS ON OKLAHOMA CITY** – Many UCC pastors have commented in their newsletters on the Oklahoma City bombing. Here is a sample.

"The God we in the UCC believe in is a God of redemptive love; a God who is not interested in punishment, but growth, healing and trusting. Be careful that the religious voice we listen to is one which speaks the language of redemptive love and is concerned with building up the community."

– the Rev. Fritz Mellberg, Hope UCC, Hiawatha, Iowa

"In our search for a secure society we are confronted with the reality that small numbers of minds gone wrong can create havoc and destroy dreams. How does God and faith fit into all this? I'm not sure, but I am convinced that there is a relationship between social pain and violence and the human misunderstanding of God."

– the Rev. Ross McGuire, Sierra Vista (Ariz.) Community UCC

"I was doubly saddened by the instant speculation that Muslims must be involved. When will we ever learn not to jump to conclusions based on stereotypes?"

– the Rev. David Bahr, Archwood UCC, Cleveland

"I invite you to pray for the families whose lives have been changed forever because of the inability of a few to use the resources available to them for registering their dissatisfaction with the government. Pray also for the bombers that they too shall be forgiven."

– the Rev. Henrietta Stith Andrews, Ridgeview UCC, White Plains, N.Y.



**CAN I QUOTE YOU?** – “To do ministry today, it is necessary to be a person of faith. Thirty years ago, all it took was being a professional.”

-- a retiring pastor as quoted in *Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream*, C. Kirk Hadaway & David A. Roozen (Abingdon Press, 1995).

### WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED GENERAL SYNOD?

– Each of the 6,200 local congregations in the UCC controls its own money, ministry and mission. No bishops in the UCC. How, then, does the denomination accomplish anything as a denomination? The answer, in part, lies with the General Synod, a biennial deliberative body, meeting June 29-July 4 in Oakland, Calif. The Synod speaks to the churches and national agencies, not for them, on issues as diverse as a new hymn book, affirmative action, baptism, economic and social justice, ordination and Christian education. It tries to be as close to the collective feelings of the 1.5 million members as is possible. The 700-plus delegates, chosen by their conferences, represent the church by age, sex, ethnic/racial heritage, lay and clergy. Resolutions and pronouncements, which often draw the attention of the media, can be proposed by delegates, congregations, associations or conferences. These documents are submitted to conferences, delegates and anyone else willing to pay a small fee for study and comment long before Synod convenes. There is often vigorous floor debate before Synod votes on a proposed statement.

Participatory democracy? You bet.

*Keeping You Posted* is edited by William C. Winslow and produced monthly by the UCC Office of Communication, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115-1100.

Send story ideas to: William C. Winslow, UCC Office of Communication, 475 Riverside Dr., 16th fl., New York, NY 10115.

**THE GUTTER FUND** – It wasn't such an unusual way to repair the church's leaky copper gutters – pledge \$33 a foot. But the pledge letter was unusual in that it appealed to members' sense of well being for the building.

What has **Church in the Gardens, Flushing, N.Y.**, given me?" read the heading. "Oneness: The hidden agendas of life have vanished and seem less important. Trust: My friends care for me and each other and respect each other. Friendship and Fellowship: I worship with others openly with my personal conviction. Vulnerability: Be being open and trusting, I am who I am. Acceptance: My family and myself are accepted without any reservation or restriction."

Then, the second headline, "What is my responsibility to my church?" And the answer: "to trust and give back what has been so wonderfully given to me and to help provide for the continuing maintenance and growth of my church."

The payoff? \$10,000 raised in six weeks.

**NUCLEAR FREE OR A NUCLEAR PORCUPINE?** – Miyoko Minamiko is a *hibakusha*, survivor of an A-bomb attack. She was a 12-year-old school girl when the bomb hit. "Suddenly, there was a big fire ball and the woman next to me disappeared," she told the UC Board for World Ministries staff. "I was carried away by the blast. All my clothes were burned off, hands, legs blackened, temporary loss of eyesight. I said to myself, 'I am dying.'" Minamiko has been treated for cancer and has endured so much cosmetic surgery, some 30 operations in all, that there seems little left of her original physical self.

This gentle Japanese lady came to New York City as an unpaid ambassador to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and to witness before the United Nations, which is debating an extension of the 25-year-old Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The treaty, which the U.S. has signed, allows the nuclear club of nations to keep its stockpile of weapons while denying entry to others. She was joined by two well known UCC peace activists, William Sloane Coffin and George Webber. Coffin put his finger on the problem when he told a group of fasters that "either the world becomes nuclear-free or the whole planet becomes a nuclear porcupine." In pushing for total nuclear disarmament, Coffin said not only was the U.S. not moving in that direction, it is modernizing its present stock.

**PROVIDE ACCESS AND THEY WILL COME** – The UCC was one of several groups to encourage Congress to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act. But the lawmakers exempted churches. Does that mean a local church is exempt from wheel chair accessible ramps and other changes? Yes and no, we learn from *Courier*, publication of the UCC's Pennsylvania Southeast Conference. Churches that open their doors to outside agencies and groups, say a public concert or community meeting, may have to make "reasonable accommodations" for persons with disabilities, as interpreted by local laws. But the church has the responsibility to remove barriers if it is to be a responsive community. The church is an advocate for all, so what better place to begin the opening of society to those with disabilities than in our churches?